

Gold coin shows that shopping pays

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and paper money.

Q—We must sell our U.S. \$20 gold piece dated 1897. On the same day, I received from local dealers bids ranging from \$100 to \$360. Why was there so much variation?

B.V., Chicago

A—Most likely, the person who offered you \$360 had a ready buyer for your gold. The low-ball dealers probably had several other similar coins in stock or perhaps they were trying to take advantage of you.

As the experts say, it always pays to shop around when buying or selling old coins.

Q—I'm unhappy that the government won't sell its gold "bullion coins" directly to the public. What will keep the retailers from price gouging?

A.D., Dubuque, Ia.

A—Competition. Uncle Sam hopes that thousands of dealers will sell the coins, including all those retailers who currently peddle Maple Leafs and Krugers. The rivalry among dealers will keep the coins fairly priced, or so the theory goes.

Q—I own a paper 50-cent piece, series 1875. When I mention this U.S. bill to my coin-collecting friends, they say they doubt that any such paper money exists. Could you enlighten me?

W.G., Wheaton

A—During the Civil War, people hoarded coins of all denominations with abandon. To help relieve the shortages of "hard money," federal officials printed fractional currency—paper money—in denominations ranging from 3 to 50 cents. Production continued until 1876, when the Treasury began redeeming fractional bills for silver coins.

Your specimen might retail for as much as \$10 if it's in at least "very good condition."

● As many as 25 dealers will buy and sell old coins Oct. 5 at the annual show of the McHenry County Coin Club. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the American Legion Post, 406 Woodstock St., Crystal Lake. Admission is free.